

SERMON SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

Remember & Anticipate

How does each sermon connect to this theme?

In this season of Advent, we **remember and anticipate**; remember the promises that have been fulfilled, and the incarnation and birth of the Immanuel - *God with us*, and we also anticipate His return, the end of all evil and pain, and the new creation. Advent is a season of juxtapositions: *"God is in the manger, wealth in poverty, light in darkness, succor in abandonment. No evil can befall us; whatever men may do to us, they cannot but serve the God who is secretly revealed as love and rules the world and our lives"* (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 1943).

The second Sunday of Advent confronts us with a choice as we explore Nicodemus' conversation with Jesus at night. They discuss humanity's love of darkness and the decision to step into **His light**.

The third Sunday of Advent prompts us to acknowledge, respond to, and anticipate **His supremacy**, over all things.

The final Sunday of Advent reveals the unexpectedness of **His coming**, at Jesus' birth, in His life and death, and also at His return.


Christmas Day leads us into the Christ Hymn in Philippians 2, the narrative of **His love** shown in His humiliation and exaltation. We are invited to prove our love for Christ through unity with and humility toward each other.

The End of Year service reminds us of **His benefits** and goodness as we respond with wonder, praise, and gratitude.

Advent is a season of waiting and remembering. Yet, our whole life is a season of Advent, that is, a season of waiting and anticipating in the last Advent, for the time when He will come again.

I wish you a most contemplative Advent season and holy Christmas with your families, your congregations, and in your communities.

The peace of Christ be with you,



John S. Schnabel

DECEMBER 2025

December 7

Remember & Anticipate:
His light

December 14

Remember & Anticipate:
His supremacy

December 21

Remember & Anticipate:
His coming

December 25

CHRISTMAS DAY

Remember & Anticipate:
His love

December 28

END OF YEAR

Remember & Anticipate:
His benefits

SERMON SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

BASED ON THE DIVINE SERVICE GUIDE FOR DECEMBER 7

Where are we in the Bible?

Drawing on the opening words of Genesis, the prologue (John 1:1-18) to the Gospel of John introduces Jesus, the Messiah and only Son of the Father, as the incarnation of the Word that was with God before all things and through which all things came into being. Three assertions characterize the Word: the Word was with God, became flesh, and is now ever with God. The prologue introduces many of the major themes and imagery of the Gospel. It includes the coming of the light into darkness, the rejection of the light, the call to believe, and Jesus' identity as the Messiah and Son of the Father in whom there is life.

In Scripture, light is an image for God and for entities that come from or belong to God; light thus refers to (1) that which brings salvation; (2) blessedness, or the heavenly or divine realms; (3) life, when contrasted with the darkness of death; and (4) the path of right conduct. Darkness is the realm of terror, gloom, death, and lack of knowledge of God. Because light dispels darkness, or illumines a path in the darkness, it is linked with joy, life, understanding, and ultimately life with God. Shining in the darkness and shedding light on all, this light makes it possible for all to see, while simultaneously exposing or convicting those who do not come to the light.

What are the key themes based on the Bible verse, its context, and the DSG?

1. A conversation at night
2. Choosing the darkness
3. Stepping into the light

REMEMBER & ANTICIPATE: **His light**

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

John 3:19-21

And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.

FOUNDATIONAL READINGS:

Scripture
John 1:1-18, 3:1-21

Catechism
3.4.2

Discussion Questions

Read John 1:1-18 and John 3:1-21. Discuss the themes of light and darkness; their meaning, responses to them, and what they teach us about Jesus Christ.

What can we learn from Nicodemus' conversation with Jesus? Why is each path in coming to Jesus different?

What does the light of Christ expose? How could this leave us feeling vulnerable? How could it be a comfort?

How can we remember and anticipate the coming of the Light in this season?

SERMON SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

BASED ON THE DIVINE SERVICE GUIDE FOR DECEMBER 14

REMEMBER & ANTICIPATE: **His supremacy**

Where are we in the Bible?

Chapter 3 begins with Jesus' interaction with Nicodemus. Through their conversation, Jesus makes it clear to him that baptism with water and the Spirit is a prerequisite to "see" and "enter" the kingdom of God. Following their conversation, the scene shifts to the land of Judea (3:22-23), where we find Jesus' disciples baptizing (4:1-2). At the same time, John the Baptist was also baptizing in a place called Aenon, which was likely located west of the Jordan River, near Samaria.

John the Baptist's disciples came to realize that more people were going to Jesus' disciples to be baptized than were coming to John (3:26). Sensing their concern over this, John reminds them that he is not the Christ, but rather the one sent to prepare the way (3:28). It's at this point that John makes it clear that his purpose has been fulfilled, and that Christ is now supreme. His purpose was to "*prepare the way of the Lord*" (Isaiah 40:3, see also John 1:22-26).

What are the key themes based on the Bible verse, its context, and the DSG?

1. Acknowledging Christ's supremacy
2. Responding to Christ's supremacy
3. Anticipating Christ's supremacy

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

John 3:30

He must increase, but I must decrease.

FOUNDATIONAL READINGS:

Scripture

John 3:22-36

Colossians 1:15-18

Catechism

1.2.5.2, 3.4.1

Discussion Questions

What does it mean to give something supremacy?

Read John 3:22-36. Discuss John the Baptist's responses to his disciples. How did he find joy in his own lessening?

Why is it so difficult to make ourselves smaller and build others up?

What steps can we take to increase Christ in our words, actions, and interactions this Advent season?

What is one new thought you walked away with?

SERMON SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

BASED ON THE DIVINE SERVICE GUIDE FOR DECEMBER 21

Where are we in the Bible?

The last chapter of the last book of the Bible closes with Jesus' promise, "*Behold, I am coming quickly*" (Revelation 22:12). This message was originally given to persecuted Christians in Asia Minor who needed hope that Christ would indeed reign despite what appeared to be defeat.

In this verse, Christ identifies Himself both as the Root and Offspring of David, the fulfillment of ancient promises given in 2 Samuel 7:12-14. The imagery of the Bright and Morning Star declares that the darkness and night of sin, suffering, and separation is ending, and a new dawn is near, signaling the new creation. This bears similarity with Psalm 30:5 - "*Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.*" The hope for this breaking dawn of Christ's return grants believers an underlying joy.

Just as Israel once waited for the Messiah who came in humility rather than earthly power, we too wait for His return which will be different than many imagine.

What are the key themes based on the Bible verse, its context, and the DSG?

1. Jesus Christ appeared, not as expected
2. Jesus Christ lived and died, not as expected
3. Jesus Christ will return, not as expected

REMEMBER & ANTICIPATE: **His coming**

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Revelation 22:16b

I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star.

FOUNDATIONAL READINGS:

Scripture

Revelation 22:12-21

Catechism

3.4.15

Discussion Questions

Discuss the meaning of these titles of Christ: "the Root and Offspring of David" and "the Bright and Morning Star."

How did Jesus' appearance as a baby confound human logic and understanding?

The disciples were constantly confronted with the unexpectedness of Jesus' life and His teaching on the kingdom. How can we demonstrate the unexpectedness of His kingdom to our world and society?

As we come to the close of this season of Advent, how can we anticipate the coming of Christ? How can we live as people in the dawn of this Bright and Morning Star, in the new creation?

SERMON SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

BASED ON THE DIVINE SERVICE GUIDE FOR DECEMBER 25

Where are we in the Bible?

In the DSG, the Chief Apostle refers to Christmas as a celebration of God's love, and states: "Today we must prove to Jesus that we love Him!" *How can we prove our love to Jesus?* Philippians 2 beautifully frames a response to this question: manifest a common purpose, place others before yourself (2:1-4), and let your conduct toward one another arise out of your life in Christ, so that humility will be evident in your community (2:5-11). Jesus taught that love for one another will show the world that we are His disciples (John 13:35). Philippians 2 shows us the markers of this loving community who base their actions towards each other in the incarnation and exultation of Christ.

If we find any encouragement from Christ, any comfort in His love, if we allow the gift of the Holy Spirit in us to end division, and if we understand our own need for grace and mercy, then *"be like minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind"* (2:1-2). These first two verses of Philippians 2 lay out the basis and call for unity. Verses 3 and 4 describe what it means to value others above one's self.

In summary, verses 1-4 instruct us to be unified and humble, and verses 5-11 provide Christ as the example.

NOTE: A way to lead from the Bible reading (Luke 2:1-14) back to Philippians 2 could be to emphasize the angel's exaltation at Jesus' birth, a small foretelling of the exaltation that will come after His humiliation and death.

What are the key themes based on the Bible verse, its context, and the DSG?

1. God humbled Himself out of love
2. Humbling ourselves out of love
3. God will save those who love Him

REMEMBER & ANTICIPATE: **His love**

CHRISTMAS DAY

Philippians 2:5-7

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

BIBLE READING Luke 2:1-14

FOUNDATIONAL READINGS:

Scripture
Philippians 2:1-13

Catechism
3.4.3

Discussion Questions

Discuss the two parts of the Christ Hymn (Philippians 2:5-11): Jesus Christ's humiliation and exaltation.

Christ never ceases to be God in His humiliation: this is the revelation of God's character - He is the Servant-King. Read the quote from Bonhoeffer on the first page of the guide and discuss the paradoxes listed there. How is Christmas and Christ's incarnation a paradox? What do these juxtapositions teach us about God?

How has the world changed because Christ came to earth and died for us?

Read Philippians 1-5. How can we show that we are disciples of Christ? How is it possible to be of one mind?

What will we need to let go of to put others above ourselves?

SERMON SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

BASED ON THE DIVINE SERVICE GUIDE FOR DECEMBER 28

REMEMBER & ANTICIPATE: **His benefits**

Where are we in the Bible?

The opening verses of Psalm 103 form a deeply personal hymn of praise, where the psalmist reflects on God's overflowing goodness. He stirs his own soul to remember and rejoice in the Lord's many benefits, naming five in particular: *"who forgives, who heals, who redeems, who crowns, and who satisfies."* In these words, we see a glimpse of our God, who meets every human need, spiritual and physical alike. He grants forgiveness for the soul, healing for the body, rescue from death, honor in place of despair, and lasting satisfaction from His own hand. Today, God lifts us from the lowest places to the heights of His mercy and gives not merely enough, but the very best for our eternal life. Truly, here is abundant reason for wonder, gratitude, and praise.

What are the key themes based on the Bible verse, its context, and the DSG?

1. Give thanks to God for His goodness
2. Doing good through introspection, remorse, and repentance
3. The best time to do good

Consider opening the service with this message from Chief Apostle Helper Helge Mutschler:

"Over the past year, we have been filled with God's benefits, which have allowed us to do the good we have been able to do, whether for ourselves, for our neighbor, for the congregation, or for our family. Many good things have been done. Thank you to all those who have contributed to this. May the love you have given return to your own heart."

END OF YEAR

Psalm 103:2

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits.

FOUNDATIONAL READINGS:

Scripture
Psalm 103:1-22

Catechism
3.1.8

Discussion Questions

Read Psalm 103:1-5. Discuss each of the benefits of the Lord listed.

What can you share for your "yearbook of God's goodness" this year?

The end of the year is also a time for new beginnings: time to forgive others, to acknowledge our own guilt, to feel regret, to change our ways, to ask for forgiveness. Which of these speaks to you personally?

Discuss how wonder, praise, and gratitude for the goodness of God can be more ongoing in your life.

What is one way that you will commit to doing good next year?